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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION KUWAIT MAY 15-17: WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS; RUMSFELD IN IRAQ; ABU GHRAIB; NICHOLAS BERG; SYRIA SANCTIONS

1. SUMMARY: The swell of commentary on Abu Ghraib was slightly abated by the introduction of a bill by the Kuwaiti cabinet on May 16 supporting full political rights for women. The news pages report statements of support by liberals and women activists for the measure and flat rejection by conservative Islamists. Skepticism about government intentions in introducing the bill at the current time, in the midst of scuffles with the parliament over electoral reforms and with conservative Islamist MPs over the "legality" of public music concerts, is found in both camps. The former Secretary General of the Kuwait Democratic Forum, Ahmed Al-Dayeen wrote: "Had the government been serious about granting women political rights, it would have presented an appeal to the Constitutional Court, challenging Article I of the election law as unconstitutional." END SUMMARY.

2. "You Are A Liar"
Dr. Sami Naser Khalifa wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-A'am (5/17): "On his most recent visit to Iraq and Abu Ghraib, Donald Rumsfeld, American Secretary of Defense, thanked the American troops for doing a "wonderful job" in Iraq. [a]t a time when the Iraqi people are humiliated and killed on a daily basis, and their houses demolished. Abu Ghraib, the place where Saddam committed the most horrifying acts against Iraqis, is now witnessing the same acts of torture and degradation by American troops."

3. "Zargawi Has Blood On His Hands"
Khaled Al-Enezi wrote in independent Al-Seyassah (5/15): "Our hearts were wracked with pain while we watched in horror the brutal slaughter of American citizen, Nick Berg. Not only did the assassins express victory, they also dared to mention the name of God, ignoring the world's reaction to such an association. This decayed terrorist ideology, which disregards the interests of Muslims and erodes their present and their future, also turns a blind eye to the great principles of Islam."

4. "Unjust Punishment"
Dr. Ayed Al-Mana'a wrote in independent Al-Watan (5/15): "Why does the U.S. insist on punishing Syria? Syria has done nothing that can be described as harming the interests of the United States. Is the American pressure on Syria a means to please the Zionist lobby and Zionist radicals in Israel? Or, is the aim to economically smother Syria and thus weaken her politically so that Israel can impose its conditions over Damascus? Isn't this considered unjustified U.S. aggression against Syria? Doesn't the American administration realize that by harming Syria, or any other Arab country, it is in fact provoking all Arabs? Or does Washington care to please only the Zionists?"

5. "Democracy: American Style"
Hussein Behbehani wrote in independent Al-Qabas (5/15): "The American occupation forces revealed to the world [in the photographs from Abu Ghraib prison] the extent of their brutality, arrogance, violations of human rights and disregard for international law. If this is the new Iraq, which the United States wants Arabs to follow as an example of a new democracy American-style, then we say to the American administration: Thanks for nothing. Why should we be shocked about the cruelty of American forces and this administration? Even before the invasion of Iraq, Americans were committing human rights violations on a daily basis by killing innocent Palestinian civilians, through Israel, with American-made weapons, and even blessing the 'Man of Peace,' Sharon."

6. "American Talismans"
Mohammed Musa'ed Al-saleh wrote in independent Al-Qabas (5/17): "The two most crucial problems facing the Middle East are: the situation in Iraq, and occupied Palestine. In the case of Iraq, despite the imminent handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis, the American administration announced it would stay, if asked by the provisional Iraqi government. How do the Americans know they will be asked to

stay, and what kind of sovereignty is it when the occupation authority decides on Iraq's behalf on such a critical issue? As for Palestine, President Bush promised the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005. Now, due to election considerations, this date has been postponed, to provide Sharon, Bush's ally, the means to annihilate the Palestinians, and to win more Jewish-American votes."

17. "Women's Rights?"

Jassem Boodai, Editor-in-Chief, wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-A'am (5/17): "Kuwait will wake up today with news that the Cabinet will present a bill which will grant women political rights. It is no coincidence that the issue was announced just before the Prime Minister's departure to Jeddah, where he will participate in the GCC Consultation Summit--the same GCC that is being challenged by reforms, progress and international survival. We hope this bill will pave the path to real reforms in Kuwait. The subject of women's political rights cannot be realized if it does not become part of a broader range of political issues, which seek to ascend within the political life, toward the establishment of a truly functioning civil society. We want this to be a step towards establishing a constitutional emirate."

18. "A Government That Is Scattering Ashes In People's Eyes"

Ahmad Al-Dayeen wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-A'am (5/17): "Once again, the government has scattered ashes in the eyes of Kuwaiti women and liberals by approving a bill that will grant women political rights. Had the government been serious about granting women political rights, it would have presented an appeal to the constitutional court, challenging Article I of the election law as unconstitutional for its blatant bias against women. We await the scattering of more ashes."

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